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Group that rescues Afghans from Taliban says in lawsuit it was scammed

The nonprofit Save Our Allies alleges in a lawsuit that it paid multiple entities that pledged but failed to extract 200 people stranded in Pakistan

By [Dan Lamothe](#)

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A U.S. nonprofit that facilitates the rescue of Afghans from Taliban rule claims it was defrauded of hundreds of thousands of dollars by companies that promised but failed to relocate nearly 200 people awaiting help in Pakistan, according to a new lawsuit filed in federal court in South Florida.

The case underscores the challenging, unorthodox deals being brokered by private organizations that want to help American allies and their families left behind after the Biden administration's hastily orchestrated evacuation of Afghanistan last year. Tens of thousands of Afghans are believed to qualify for a new life in the United States, either because they helped the U.S. government during the war or are related to someone who did. The U.S. government is processing a long backlog of Afghan visa applicants, many who fled to third countries such as Pakistan and Albania.

The lawsuit, brought by a group called [Save Our Allies](#), names three companies and three individuals, including Matthew Nelson, a former Marine Corps officer who briefly served on the nonprofit's board of directors.

The companies are Ravenswood Group, an advising firm based in Florida; Sama Global, an investment firm in Qatar; and City Gate Trading and Contracting Company, which furnishes housing in Qatar. The other individuals are Gregory Gustin, the chief executive officer at Ravenswood, and Shahzada Khurram, who is listed as holding senior positions at Ravenswood and Sama Global.

Nelson did not respond to several requests seeking comment. Gustin and Khurram denied any wrongdoing by them or their companies after being contacted by The Washington Post. City Gate did not respond to requests for comment.

The lawsuit seeks to recoup more than \$735,000 in costs the nonprofit says it incurred, plus more than \$2.2 million in damages. It alleges that Nelson approached Save Our Allies early in 2022 looking to evacuate the Afghans from Pakistan to Qatar “if only Save Our Allies provided him with funding.” Nelson was then brought on as a member of the nonprofit’s board of directors, and vouched for Gustin and Khurram, the lawsuit claims.

The complaint alleges that Gustin told Save Our Allies he had a special relationship with the government of Qatar and that, coupled with Khurram’s background as a Pakistani-born businessman, they had the ability to obtain long-term visas in Qatar for refugees. The lawsuit alleges the two men made similar claims to other organizations assisting Afghan refugees, though it does not name those groups.

Save Our Allies, according to the complaint, entered into an agreement on Jan. 10 that stated that Sama Global would spearhead the effort to secure visas and transportation to Qatar, with Ravenswood and other companies possibly working as subcontractors. A copy of the agreement is contained in the lawsuit. It indicates that Nelson signed on behalf of Save Our Allies and Khurram signed for Sama Global. The project’s costs, the document says, were “not to exceed US \$750,000” without prior approval.

Save Our Allies wired a total of about \$590,000 to City Gate, Khurram and Ravenswood in six transactions between Jan. 18 and Feb. 14, according to the complaint. In a memo on Ravenswood letterhead dated Feb. 25, a document also contained in the lawsuit, Gustin allegedly wrote to Save Our Allies that the services the nonprofit wanted were worth about \$10 million per planeload of refugees. It claims that his company already had spent \$1.5 million on food, security, medical exams, visas and flights, and that the operation could proceed if Save Our Allies sent more money.

“So please KNOW that we are in the home stretch or whatever symbology you want,” the memo says, adding that “the fat lady has not yet sung, but she is on stage, adjusting the microphone.” Ravenswood and Sama Global were “out of cash,” the memo says, and it is “cash that is needed to get the lady to sing.”

The lawsuit alleges that, to date, Save Our Allies has spent about \$735,000, including the wire transfers to Ravenswood, Sama Global and City Gate, plus about \$145,000 to third parties to feed and protect the Afghans as they languish in Pakistan.

Nick Palmisciano, a U.S. Army veteran and founding member of Save Our Allies, said in an interview that it costs the nonprofit about \$50,000 per month to feed, house and provide security for the group of Afghans. Among the group, the lawsuit says, was a 12-year-old girl who died of leukemia in Pakistan in March. The complaint alleges that, for days, her family was told she would be able to travel soon for medical treatment.

Nelson resigned from Save Our Allies in April, according to a resignation letter provided to The Post by the nonprofit. In it, he wrote of leaving “with mixed feelings” after the “many issues” surrounding the mission in Pakistan.

“I appreciate the opportunity that was presented to me to be a part of the amazing mission and outstanding team that is Save Our Allies,” the letter says.

Palmisciano said Save Our Allies now believes that only 32 of the Afghans stranded in Pakistan have a legitimate path to living in the United States. It is unclear what might happen to the rest, he said.

Save Our Allies believed the information Nelson provided the group was authentic because he had participated in meetings with U.S. government officials previously, said another official with the nonprofit, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the issue’s sensitivity. Save Our Allies, the official said, eventually discovered inconsistencies in the paperwork for many of the Afghans whom Nelson recommended.

The lawsuit alleges that Nelson “knew, or should have known” that Sama Global and Ravenwood “lacked the capability or intent to assist the refugees.”

Gustin said in a brief interview that it is “incomprehensible” that Save Our Allies can “think they can lay the blame on someone else,” and that his company was “never under contract.” Gustin did not respond to follow-up questions about the Jan. 10 agreement and Feb. 25 memo that are included in the lawsuit.

Khurram, reached by email, accused Save Our Allies of making “false statements.” He also said he never signed a contract with Save Our Allies, suggesting the nonprofit wanted to blame Khurram’s company because the nonprofit had accepted money from donors.

After The Post sent Khurram a copy of the Jan. 10 agreement contained in the lawsuit, he denied having signed it and said the signature on the document was not his.

Magda Jean-Louis contributed to this report.